

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AID-05 ACDA-05 SAM-01 SAB-01 SCCT-01 DHA-02 /073 W

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R 061057Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6617

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1309

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS SY

SUBJ: REPORTS OF FURTHER DISTURBANCES IN SYRIA

REF: DAMASCUS 1244

1. IN WAKE OF HAMA DISTURBANCES REPORTED REFTEL, WE CONTINUE RECEIVE REPORTS OF MORE INCIDENTS WITH ANTI-REGIME OVERTONES. KNOWLEDGEABLE PALESTINIAN SOURCE TOLD US MARCH 4 THAT LEADER OF IDLIB BAATH PARTY BRANCH HAD BEEN ASSASSINATED FEW DAYS AGO, AND SUGGESTED THIS WAS CONNECTED WITH HAMA DISTURBANCES. HE ADDED THAT PEOPLE OF HAMA HAVE BEGUN TO DEMAND RELEASE OF THOSE CITIZENS ARRESTED BY AUTHORITIES BECAUSE NO EVIDENCE HAS YET BEEN UNEARTHED TO INVOLVE THEM WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS.

2. SYRIAN WHO VISITED ALEPPO LAST WEEKEND TOLD AMBASSADOR HE UNDERSTOOD THERE HAD BEEN ASSASSINATION IN IDLIB BUT THAT HE HEARD THAT IT HAD BEEN G-2 COUNTERPART OF HAMA OFFICIAL MURDERED IN FEBRUARY AND THAT IDLIB OFFICIAL HAD ALSO BEEN AN ALAWITE. WORD
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IN ALEPPO WAS THAT COMMUNISTS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR

IDLIB OFFICIAL'S MURDER AND THAT IT HAD BEEN AN ATTEMPT TO INFLAME SUNNI-ALAWITE FEELINGS.

3. CONTRADICTORY VERSION ABOUT IDLIB WAS PROVIDED AMBASSADOR MARCH 5 BY COS SHIHABI WHO ASSERTED IDLIB MURDER HAD NO CONNECTION WITH HAMA AFFAIR, BUT WAS NON-POLITICAL SETTLING OF GRUDGE BETWEEN TWO BAATH PARTY MEMBERS. SHIHABI AFFIRMED BOTH IDLIBIS WERE CIVILIANS, HOLDING NO OFFICIAL POSTS IN EITHER GOVERNMENT OR PARTY.

4. EMBOFF VISITING WITH DAMASCENE FAMILY MARCH 5 WAS TOLD THAT MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD TRYING TO STIR UP TROUBLE AGAINST REGIME IN SCHOOL SYSTEM. SAID NEW FEMALE DRESS CODE HAD BEEN PROMULGATED AT THEIR DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL PREVIOUS WEEK WHICH CAUSED GIRLS TO "GO ON STRIKE" AND BROUGHT PROTESTING PARENTS IN TO TALK WITH SCHOOL AUTHORITIES. FAMILY SAID BROTHERHOOD BEHIND THIS AND THAT WHILE THEIR OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE IS DECENCY IN DRESS, THEIR REAL AIM IS TO UNDERMINE REGIME THROUGH EXACERBATION OF MUSLIM-CRISTIAN TENSIONS.

COMMENT: AS FOLLOWERS OF SYRIAN AFFAIRS KNOW, WE ARE REPORTING FROM COUNTRY WHERE RUMOR IS WAY OF LIFE AND FACT IS OFTEN EXTRAORDINARILY HARD TO SEPARATE FROM FICTION. RUMORS OF CONFESSIONAL FRICTIONS, IN PARTICULAR, EBB AND FLOW; WE SEEM TO BE ON CREST OF NEW WAVE OF SUCH STORIES, PROBABLY STIMULATED BY RECENT EVENTS IN LEBANON. ONE SURE THING IS THAT THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES ARE ACUTELY SENSITIVE TO REPORTS OF ANYONE ATTEMPTING TO INFLAME INTER-COMMUNAL TENSIONS. THEY HAVE BEEN QUICK, WE UNDERSTAND, TO "COUNSEL" THOSE RELIGIOUS SHEIKHS IN BOTH DAMASCUS AND ALEOOP WHO, IN THEIR FRIDAY SERMONS, HAVE OVERDONE THEME OF HOW MUSLEMS MUST STICK TOGETHER AGAINST "THE OTHERS."
MURPHY

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